

**The Lives of Ten School Leavers from a Special Class  
in a Primary School in KwaZulu-Natal**

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	Page
ABSTRACT	i
DECLARATION	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iii
TABLE OF CONTENTS	
<b>CHAPTER 1: Introduction to the study</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 Introduction	1
1.2 The Present Status of Special Classes	1
1.3 Rationale for the Study	2
1.4 The Study	3
<b>CHAPTER 2: Literature Review</b>	<b>4</b>
2.1 Introduction	4
2.2 Theoretical framework for the study	4
2.3 Empirical studies undertaken internationally	6
2.4 Conclusion	9
<b>CHAPTER 3: Research Design and Methodology</b>	<b>10</b>
3.1 Introduction.	10
3.2 Research Approach	10
3.3 The research context	12
3.4 The design of the study	16

3.5	Development of the interview schedule	17
3.6	Interviews	18
3.7	Data analysis	19
3.8	Conclusion	19
<b>CHAPTER 4: Analysis and Discussion of Findings</b>		<b>21</b>
4.1	Introduction	21
4.2	Analysis of the ten life stories	21
4.3	Discussion of findings	44
4.3.1	Parents, Caregivers and Emotional Concerns	45
4.3.2	Assessing help and support	45
4.3.3	Negative attitudes towards school	46
4.3.4	Exclusion/ Inclusion in the Curriculum	47
4.3.5	Experience of Negative Attitudes and Stereotypes	48
4.3.6	The Complexities of life after School	49
4.4	Conclusion	49
<b>CHAPTER 5: Conclusion and Implications</b>		<b>51</b>
<b>References</b>		<b>53</b>

## ABSTRACT

This study explored the lives of ten school leavers who were in the special class at the school in Durban, KwaZulu-Natal. The intention of the research was to gain insight into the schooling experiences of ten schools leavers, and to examine the factors that impact on these particular life outcomes. A life story approach was utilised in this qualitative case study of the ten individuals. Interviews were conducted with the school leavers and parents or significant family member. The findings in this study if embedded within the social rights discourse reveal that for many of the learners systemic barriers within the schooling system served as barriers to positive life outcomes. The ten learners experienced various exclusionary pressures in their schooling years that have negatively impacted on their life outcomes. The school leavers face complex barriers that make it virtually impossible for them to achieve independence and full participation in society. These include no job opportunities, lack of any work skills, low levels of schooling, dependence on sheltered employment with low levels of income, dependence on the government social welfare grant, poor self-esteem. The findings further revealed that these learners might be vulnerable to social and emotional risk factors. The study suggests that there is a need for further research on school leavers from special class provision in the context of Education White paper 6: Building an Inclusive Education and Training System, (Department of Education, 2001) so that their needs can be given priority in the implementation process that is currently underway in the country.

## DECLARATION

This study represents the original work by the author and has not been submitted in any form to another University. Where use has been made of the work of others, this has been duly acknowledged in the text.



Iris Ruth Barrett

Statement by Supervisor:

This mini- dissertation is submitted with/ without my approval.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Professor A. Muthukrishna.

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

### 1.1 Introduction

In South Africa, learners who could not benefit adequately from the regular curriculum offered at a primary school, but who were nevertheless educable, and who did not fit into the special group of disabled learners identified by the Education Act No. 41 of 1965, were placed in special classes in terms of Section 14 of Government Notice No. R2029 of November 1971. In other words, it was believed that learners in this category would benefit from a suitable curriculum but not one equal to the mainstream curriculum. Educating them in a mainstream may be detrimental to their own progress and that of other learners in that class (Education Act No 41 of 1965). The view was also that these learners could not benefit from regular instruction provided in the mainstream class, and therefore, they required special education tailored to their specific needs with the focus on facilitating their adaptation to the community. Hence, the special classes were referred to as adaptation classes in the former House of Representatives Department of Education (Coloured Education Department).

### 1.2 The present status of special classes

At present, the special classes still exist in historically Coloured, Indian and White schools although the number has been greatly reduced. A psychologist had to assess learners and approve placement in the special class after the school makes referrals.

These learners were labelled Educable Mentally retarded (EMR) in the U.S.A, Educationally Subnormal (ESN) in the U.K, and mildly mentally retarded in South Africa. In the following section, I put into perspective the rationale for my electing to conduct a study on this particular group of learners.

### **1.3 Rationale for the study**

I am a trained special needs educator. Since 1995, I have been teaching learners labelled as 'learning disabled' or 'slow learners' in a special class attached to a mainstream school. I have often wondered what has become of the lives of my learners after their schooling years. At school, some learners from the special classes remain in the facility until they are 13 years old. They are then transferred to a prevocational school where the curriculum focuses on skills training such as mechanics, carpentry, home economics, hairdressing, typing and some academic subjects offered at a lower functional level. Those who do not qualify for admission to a prevocational school are transferred to a training centre for individuals who have a range of intellectual disabilities, but where the majority of individuals have severe intellectual disability. Others remain at the primary school until they either leave school, which could be at late adolescence, or alternatively they drop out of school.

No study on school leavers from special classes has been done in South Africa. I became motivated to undertake the study because I had first hand experience of a cousin who had been in a special class, and the challenges he has faced in trying to find employment. Was he the exception or the rule? This and the fact that I had taught

many special class learners motivated my research. Famous people like Thomas Edison, Helen Keller, Leonardo Da Vinci and Whoopi Goldberg among others were people who also had learning disabilities. A review of literature shows that they had become successful. I wondered what my study would reveal.

#### **1.4 The study**

The study explored the life histories of ten school leavers who were in the special class at the school at which I teach. The intention of my research was to explore the factors which impacted on their life outcomes, and what has become of them since they left school. Life histories are embedded in social history including political, social, economic and cultural histories. I believed that my study would make a contribution to the field in view of the fact that I was not able to locate any studies in South Africa on school leavers from special classes. I was also motivated by the emphasis on new policies and legislation in South Africa, stressing principles of 'education for all', inclusion, equity and social justice (cf. Education White Paper 6, Department of Education, July 2001; South African Schools Act of 1996). I believe findings from my study could inform policy implementation on inclusive education that is now underway in the provinces

## **CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter will discuss firstly, the theoretical framework for this research. Secondly, a review of a limited number of empirical studies that examined the lives of school leavers from special education will be examined. I was not able to locate studies in the South African context focusing on school leavers from special classes. The studies reviewed have explored experiences in international contexts. A search of the Internet indicates that special classes attached to a mainstream school exist in many countries. However, even internationally, I have found that there is limited research that has been done on school leavers from special classes. The studies reviewed examined issues of school leavers, including work placement, dropout from special classes, employment status, employment history and vocational training of school leavers.

### **2.2 Theoretical Framework for the Study**

This research project sought to explore the life histories of ten learners who were in my class. The intention of the research was to explore the factors that have impacted on their lives outcomes, and what has become of them since they left school. I set out to investigate the following research questions:

- a) How did the ten special class school leavers experience schooling?
- b) How do the ten special class school leavers experience their lives?
- c) What factors have impacted on their life outcomes?

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The social model of disability, (which includes sub-categories of disability such as including learning disabilities/difficulties, will frame this research. The social model dismisses the individualist notions of disability, and attributes disability to environmental factors or a 'disabling society'. In other words, this model views disability as located within institutional cultures and practices of society. It views disability as oppression, and looks at physical, environmental, social and psychological disadvantage experienced by 'disabled people'.

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The other theory which I feel also, informs my study of the life histories of special class learners is the critical theory. Critical theory seeks to answer the following questions;

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What are schools for?

Who do schools serve? What are the multiple functions of schools? What is the nature of the human experience within institutions?

What and whose interests are served by developmental regulation with respect to learners' lives in particular contexts?

The body of knowledge referred to as critical psychology draws from critical theory, and stresses that we need to understand peoples' cultural embedding, and the social production of developmental outcomes (Morss, 1996; Kaye, 2000). Human development is not a matter of freedom, choice and equality, and to pretend it is so is to collaborate with oppressive systems of society. Childhood is not objective and value free, there is the presence of complex interests, agendas and relations power.

class or

In studying the life histories of the special class leavers, these are the issues I wish to investigate.

### **2.3 Empirical studies undertaken internationally**

In Germany, Muhl (1995) in his observations of during work placements found that many learners with disabilities, including those with learning disabilities face difficulties in the early stages of employment. They also appear socially isolated and appear not to have sufficient initiative to correct their own mistakes. Males have been better able to find employment. Females find work opportunities in domestic situations in homes or hotels.

Karpniski, Neubert and Graham (1992) did research on the outcomes for graduates and dropouts with mild disabilities in a rural setting in England. They interviewed special education learners with mild disabilities who had either graduated or dropped out of school. The sample consisted of 99 learners who were classified mentally disabled. Of these students 40 % had dropped out of school. Two surveys were done. The first investigated employment status, employment history, secondary and post secondary vocational training. The second examined changes on employment status, residential status, and receipt of economic support. The learners were interviewed at two different times. The results of the interviews were then analysed in terms of the school histories, employment standards, and post secondary education and training experiences.

The study showed that:

- All the respondents were employed,
- They earned above the minimum wage,
- Dropouts and graduates had the same chance of finding employment, and received equivalent wages,
- Females had less opportunity of finding employment, and the study showed that many of them risked being unemployed,
- Most respondents were not pursuing secondary school options,
- 60 % of school dropouts were employed but they constantly changed jobs,
- No student proceeded to college level.

The study showed that there were various reasons for learners dropping out of school, irregular attendance 38%, employment 15%, personal choice 15%, no reason 32%, discipline problems 32%, academic problems 24%, boredom 12%, and pregnancy 12%.

Kotering and Braziel (1999) did research on school dropouts using learning- disabled learners from four schools in a rural setting in a south- eastern state of California. The purpose of the study was to investigate why special education learners drop out of school. Lichenstein (1993) had done an ethnographic investigation, and his results showed that 75 % of learning disabled experienced frustration at school because of alienation. The study by Kotering and Braziel was conducted in 1993 and again in 1994. The study was undertaken in a rural setting, as was the previous one. The setting

was a south- eastern state with 9,400 inhabitants. The sample was taken from four schools in 1993 and 1994. Eighty- eight learners formed the sample. The sample of school leavers actually made up 50% of special education dropouts. Interviews were conducted at the local shopping centre. Some findings of the research were:

64% of the youth said they would return to school. Many responded that they would return to school if conditions were different. The need for parents and teachers to become more supportive and encouraging was also expressed. The youth felt that there are factors that could have prevented them from dropping out of school. These included:

- The need to change their own attitudes towards school
- A change in the school's attendance policy. They wanted absenteeism to be overlooked. They found having to come to school on Saturdays to catch up on lost work a problem.
- A change in teacher behaviour, in particular, racist and violent behaviour
- Fairer discipline procedures
- Less harsh school suspension policies.

Most of the students interviewed were employed. They earned above average salaries and also received medical benefits. There was no difference in opportunities for dropouts and graduates. As with the previous study by Karpinski, Neubert and Graham, (1992) females had less opportunity of finding employment. Graduates and dropouts received equivalent wages. Dropouts changed their jobs more often. There were many similarities between the findings of the two studies.

## 2.4 Conclusion

It is conceded that the review of literature is limited, in particular with regard to empirical studies in the area of focus. Internationally, I have been able to locate three studies on school leavers that focus on issues related directly to my study.

Many findings were common to all the three studies, and highlight some broad factors that impacted on the participants lives. Some of the common findings were: that males were better able to find jobs while females struggled to find employment, most respondents did not pursue secondary school options, most school leavers were employed and they earned average and above salaries with the added bonus of medical benefits. many participants changed their jobs more than once, a large number said they would return to school if they were given the opportunity, and most participants said if both parents and teachers had been more supportive this would have encouraged them to remain longer at school. &

The German study by Muhl (1995) differed somewhat. His study showed that learners with disabilities, including those with learning difficulties, experienced great difficulty in the early stages of employment, they appeared socially isolated, and lacking in initiative. Females found employment in hotels and domestic situations in homes.

The present study aimed at exploring these issues with a group of school leavers from a special class in Durban, KwaZulu-Natal using a life history approach.

## CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter will firstly, present the research methodology and design of the study. Firstly, it will discuss the various phases in the study. Secondly, it will provide a detailed explanation of the process of selection of the participants, in particular, outlines the strategies that were used to access the particular school leavers and their parents. Thirdly, the qualitative approach that was specifically adopted for this research project will be discussed. Finally, data collection instruments, which were developed to investigate the life histories of post special class learners, are described.

### 3.2 Research approach

This study is located within the interpretive paradigm - the aim being to understand the lives of the ten participants. According to Terreblanche and Kelly (1999:123) the interpretive research paradigm assumes that people's subjective experiences are real, that we understand them by interacting with them and that the qualitative research techniques are best suited for this task. Terre Blanche and Kelly (1999:125) further emphasize the importance of ascertaining these experiences within the contexts within which they occur. Using the interpretive paradigm thus enabled me to investigate the subjective experiences of the participants, and this has enabled me to understand those experiences by interacting with the participants in the interviews.

I used the qualitative case study approach, the unit of analysis being the group of 10 learners. In qualitative research using the case study, the researcher selects a particular

case or a certain bounded reality, and this study shows a group of past school leavers from a special class (Yin, 1988).

I found the qualitative case study approach of great value since in qualitative research, the researcher selects a particular case, rather than a variable, through which the researcher gains an understanding of a broader phenomenon. According to Cohen et al. (2000:181), "case studies can establish cause and effect...one of their strengths is that they observe in real context, recognizing that context is a powerful determinant of both cause and effect". Miles and Huberman (1994:25) think of a case as "a phenomenon of some sort occurring in a bounded context."

I used a life history approach to data gathering in this study. The goal was to explore the participant's subjective experiences and their interpretations of those experiences. Life histories are about subjectivities in that participants explain events in terms of how they are experienced, remembered and told - locating those events in a socio-historical period. According to Rakhit (1998) the value of the life history approach lies in its ability to take seriously the subjective factors in social life. It recognises that lives (including the professional lives of teachers) are complex, and that all the nuances, ambiguities, changes and richness of lived experience relate to each other. She explains that by tracing the individual's life as it evolves over time, life history can show how individuals experience, create and make sense of the rules and roles of their social worlds they live in

According to Goodson and Sikes (2001) life history researchers listen to people's stories - then tease them out and explore possible influences, and explanations, interpretations and alternatives, silences and significances - in their historical contexts. A life history researcher is interested in the social histories in which peoples' life stories are embedded.

### 3.3 The research context

The research site for this study was a community in the greater Durban area. The participants were all past learners of a primary school in Sydenham, Durban. This was a historically Coloured school. Currently, the school <sup>has</sup> with a learner population of 900 learners from the Reception year to grade 7. Attached to the mainstream classes is a special class with 23 learners. For the purpose of my study I randomly selected, stratified by gender, ten learners from a pool of learners who have left the school at least five years previously. I selected the school through convenient sampling as I am a teacher at the school and I also live in the community. Convenience sampling is a non-probability sampling procedure that indicates that the researcher chooses the most convenient population element (Steyn, Smith, Du Toit and Strashem 1994:39).

A document analysis of past school registers was done. I knew all the learners so this facilitated the selection of the sample. The parents also knew me from the school and the community. This enabled them to give me their co-operation. I decided on a group of learners who should currently be in the 20-25 year age group. My hope was that these learners would be able to reflect on their life experiences, factors that impacted

on their life outcomes, and how they are experiencing life after they have exited the school system. My sample consisted of 6 boys and 4 girls. I compiled a list of twenty learners from previous class registers, and also used the VRE 200 forms which the school psychologists completed on transferring a learner to a special class. I eliminated the learners who did not qualify to form the sample. For example, I could not trace some of the learners at all; some fell outside the age range and those who were from the orphanage in the area.

**Table 1: Profile of participants**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Reason for dropout of school</b>	<b>Grade/Phase at dropout</b>	<b>Years in Pre-vocational provision</b>	<b>Years in Training centre for Mentally Disabled</b>
1. D.	Failure, hated school. Difficult in mainstream	Special class	2	Nil
2. L.	School request	Grade 8 orientations class	2	Nil
3. S.	Age 19 years	Junior Grade	Nil	Nil
4. R.	Attained age 13. Refused Training Centre placement	Junior grade 2	Nil	Nil
5. RD.	Too old for pre-vocational school	Junior phase	Nil	Nil
6. G.	School fees unaffordable	Grade 8	6 months	Nil
7. S.	Unable to pay school fees	Grade 8 – repeating grade	2	Nil
8. F.	Included in mainstream – unable to cope	Grade 6	Nil	Nil
9. RL	Included in mainstream – unable to cope	Grade 6	Nil	Nil
10.A.	Left school when elder sister – made no progress	School readiness	Nil	1

The above table shows that of the ten participants, 3 dropped out because they had been transferred to the mainstream, and they could not cope with academic work. One learner was requested to leave the school because he was not coping. Two attended a training centre for learners with mental disabilities. One participant remained at a training centre until the age of 19 years because his parents did not know what to do with him. Two learners left the school because they could not afford the school fees. One participant was too old for placement in the pre-vocational school by the time he left primary school

Four of the participants exited the school functioning at the junior phase. Three exited from the pre-vocational 6 from the primary school. One participant left at the school readiness level. She had been placed in the training centre, and walked out of the school never to return when her elder sister dropped out.

### 3.4 The design of the study

The design of the study involved 3 phases:

Phases	Task	Activity
PHASE 1 5764	Establishing a database of school leavers.	Selection of sample.
PHASE 2	Planning interviews.	Developing an interview guide Interviews with parents present
PHASE 3	Conducting interviews with school leavers and parent.	Collate results from the interviews

In the first phase, a database of school leavers had to be established from which it was decided I would select the participants for the study. The selection was based on two main criteria; namely, the school leavers had to have been past learners at the school, at which I teach and the sample had to have an equal representation of male and female school leavers. In the second phase, I had to develop an interview guide, and on the basis of responses and the difficulties experienced the interview guide was revisited. The interview guide was piloted before implementation. I had to locate the learners, explain why I needed to interview them, and request their permission. The third phase involved visiting the homes and setting up appointments to record the interviews. I had to also make arrangements to visit when the parents were at home. A number of related concerns were anticipated before the implementation of the study. I

knew that some learners and parents might not want to speak about having been in the special class. I needed to plan time to do the interviews after working hours. Many mothers worked, and my visit could be considered an intrusion into their limited time schedules.

### **3.5 Developing an interview guide**

The aim of the study was to explore the life histories of ten school leavers from the special class. The intention was to explore the factors that have impacted on their lives. With this in mind, I included the following in the interview guide:

Early life experiences

The family

Schooling experiences

What is their literacy level? What is the literacy level of the parents?

What life skills have they acquired? Where and how did they acquire these skills?

What vocational training did they get?

Are they currently employed?

If they are not employed, how do they earn a living?

Do they feel that the school prepared them adequately for post-school life?

What are their aspirations and dreams?

In order to assess the validity of the interview questions, and to check on the nature of the instrument, Anderson (1993) recommends the piloting of the instrument be

carried out. Silverman (1993) argues that it is important for each interviewee to understand the questions, and he suggests that careful piloting of interview schedules can enhance the reliability of interviews

I piloted the instrument on a learner who had been in a special class in another school and community context. I interviewed him in his home. His mother contradicted some of the information he gave, and this necessitated my including his mother in the interview. They spoke in great detail and became very emotional about the topic because their experiences of school had not been the most pleasant. The questions had to be changed in some instances. As a result of the interview becoming very personal and emotional, I diverted from the interview questions for a while, and allowed the participants speak their feelings out. The fact that I was investigating a life history gave me the latitude to make this diversion.

### **3.6 Interviews**

In-depth, semi-structured interviews were used to obtain detailed life histories. I conducted the interviews in the homes to provide privacy and an authentic setting in the presence of parents or significant family members. The purpose for using semi-structured interviews was to enable me to obtain detailed life histories. They would also enable both parents and family members to contribute to the discussion, and allow me to probe further. I found this most helpful because in certain instances if the respondents said that they had forgotten specific issues, then a family member would remember and fill in the details.

The informal conversation style also gave me the freedom to phrase the questions as I liked and to probe responses that were unclear or ambiguous. The flexibility of the semi-structured interview provides more opportunity for the respondent to discuss what he/she means, and this may strengthen the validity of the data (Haralambos and Heald, 1985). I recorded the interviews and later transcribed them from the audio-recording.

### **3.7 Data analysis**

In the data analysis process, common themes and issues were teased out across the interviews through content analysis to examine the extent to which participants share a common theme or issue across sexes. I thereafter studied these issues and themes in order to interpret the information, and make assertions about my findings. I detected that some parents were not being totally honest in answering some personal questions but I had to work within these limitations. Knowing the parents personally helped, but at times I sensed they were being more positive than they really felt and gave me answers to create the impression that all was well. In the next section I deal with how the study was piloted.

### **3.8 Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have outlined the main aspects of the research methodology and design used in my study, and provided a suitable rationale. I have also explained the merits as well as the constraints of the methods used. The interviews became very lengthy and the transcribing became very time consuming. The interview technique

was used because of its capacity for generating discussion. Using the interview guide ensured that I kept the focus on my critical research questions.

## CHAPTER 4: ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

### 4.1 Introduction

In the analysis, the stories from parents and the individual school leavers were examined separately, and themes identified across both sets of stories obtained. The data is presented with respect to each of the participants separately according to three stages in the analysis. Stage 1 provides insights obtained on initial encounter with the data. In stage 2, the various themes that emerged are presented providing examples from the data drawing from both the data of the school leaver and their parent responses in the interviews. In stage 3; these are clustered into 7 broad clusters that I was able to establish across all participants. These can be described as broad issues that emerged from the data.

### 4.2 Analysis of the Ten Life Stories

#### Participant 1

##### *Stage 1: Initial encounter with text*

The participant has always hated school. He experienced failure since pre-school. "I was the only one who failed". He encountered an unsympathetic teacher who did not care or respond to his needs. "She made me play with blocks the whole day". The participant was reintegrated into the mainstream and became very frustrated because he was not able to cope. He encountered stigmatisation because he was older than his peers, and he was unable to function at their level. He left primary school functioning at grade 4 level and was transferred to a pre-vocational high school. He encountered

racism and lack of empathy in the school. “The white children bullied us. When we retaliated, the male teacher only listened to the white side of the story”. He eventually dropped out of school in sheer frustration. He is currently employed as a labourer for a construction company. This is his second job. “I want to have my own business”. He has definite aspirations for the future and spoke with great conviction.

*Stage 2: Identification of Themes* )

1. Emotional trauma of discovery (“My husband was more upset”. “My husband was very upset – accused me of overreacting”).
2. Early intervention by parents. (“We decided to take him to a neurologist. He was assessed by an assessment team. We were told he had learning problems. I had to travel to Amanzimtoti every day – an hour away – to take D. to an occupational therapist”).
3. Teacher had no special training (“Teacher not trained – she did not know how to deal with D.”)
4. Teacher unresponsive to child’s needs (“ He was not included in any activities. The teacher had asked for books, plastic and pencils. I found these were never used”)
 

(“I tried my best to duck school. I put a hot water bottle on my head to convince my mother I had fever.” “I sometimes walked very slowly to the bus rank and let the bus leave me.” “She worked with the other learners and left me to play”)
5. Negative attitudes to school. (“He began to hate going to school, and complained that he only played with blocks.”)

6. Parent seek help (“I spoke to the principal and raised my concerns. I showed the principal the unused books. The teacher was very annoyed that I had been to the principal”)
7. Negative attitudes of teacher (“The teacher was very upset that I had complained to the principal. She then refused to work with D.”).
8. Racism in school. (“He was in a ex-model C prevocational school. The English teacher was good but the rest did not care about the non-white children. The white children were clearly privileged.”  
 “The white children bullied us, when we retaliated, the male teacher only listened to the white side of the story.”)
9. Stigmatisation (“Some children teased me, others laughed at me”)
10. Experiencing failure (“I failed grade 1, repeated it, then I was pushed up to grade 2. I was the only one that failed.”)
11. Experience of support (“ Most teachers were helpful and kind - only the one in the special class made me play with blocks.”)
12. Goals for the future (“I would like to carry on with panel beating. As soon as I have saved some money, I want to start my own business”)

### ***Stage 3: Clusters***

In reading and re-reading data, common clusters of issues emerged. In the case of each participant, the initial themes will be grouped into the various clusters. Some themes do overlap and may fall into more than one cluster.

In cluster 3, the term curriculum is used broadly to include the ethos and culture of the learning environment; the learning programmes; the teaching practices; how learning outcomes are assessed; learning materials, facilities and equipment available; the medium of teaching and learning; the capacity of educators; the nature of support provided to enable access to the learning programmes.

Cluster 1: Parents and emotional trauma (Theme 1)

Cluster 2: Accessing support and help (Theme 2, 7)

Cluster 3: Exclusion in the curriculum (Theme 10, 8; 6; 3, 4)

Cluster 4: Experiencing negative attitudes and stereotyping from others (Theme 7, 8, 9, 10)

Cluster 5: Life after School: Successes, Dilemmas and Challenges (Theme 12)

Cluster 6: Teacher help and support (Theme 11)

Cluster 7: Goals and aspirations (Theme 12)

Cluster 8: Negative attitudes to school (Theme 4, 5)

## **Participant 2**

### ***Stage 1: Initial encounter with text***

The participant appreciated the experience of support in the primary school. “Aye miss, you were my best teacher. You helped me when I was slow.” Extra curricular activities were important to him. “I liked soccer and when you let us play cricket.” He experienced a difference in attitude of teachers from primary and high school.”

The teachers were nice at primary school but at high school they waited for you to ask for help otherwise they didn't help you." His major problem at present is boredom. He worked for his uncle for a period of two weeks. He has future goals. "I want to work with my hands." Financially he is dependent on a government grant of R 700.00 per month. His parents are very frustrated by the fact that the school did not provide any support for their son. He was placed in grade 8 and expected to cope. When he could not cope the school asked the parents to remove Larry. He thus exited the school as a result of the school's request.

***Stage 2: Identification of themes***

1. Bonded with teacher at primary school. ("Aye miss, you were my best teacher. You helped me when I was slow.")
2. Valued sports and recreation ("I liked soccer and when you let us play cricket")
3. Teacher positive attitude ("The teachers were nice at primary school. They encouraged me to work well, and they motivated me to make something of myself." "I missed my friends and kindness of teachers.")
4. Teachers unresponsive to child's needs. ("In high school, they wait for you to ask for help otherwise they didn't help you. They don't worry about you.")
5. Post school experiences ("I have done nothing. I just sit here at home and watch television then I sleep.")
6. A life of boredom ("Sometimes I get so bored. I played soccer and went to gym but I get bored of it, so I don't anymore.")

7. Goals for the future (“I would like to work with my hands. Miss, can you find me a job. I want to work. I want to make candles and sell them.”)
8. Parent concerns (“Larry is so bored at home. The school should have trained them to do something.”)
9. Low income (“He would earn R 25-00 per week or less depending on the availability of work.”)
10. School unresponsive to child’s needs (“ They just put Larry in grade 8 then they expected him to cope. Nobody gave us any support”)
11. Dependence on government social grant. (“I get R 700-00 per month.”)
12. Poor job opportunities (“He would not work at challenge because the salary is too low, and if he were employed he would lose his government grant. The low salary was a major issue for us.”)
13. Experience of difficulty with the curriculum at high school (“Maths was difficult for me. I could not understand English and Afrikaans”)

***Stage 3: Clustering of themes***

- Cluster 1: Parents and emotional trauma (Theme 9, 10)
- Cluster 2: Accessing help and support (Theme 6)
- Cluster 3: Exclusion in the curriculum (Theme 4, 8, 13)
- Cluster 4: Experience of negative attitudes and stereotyping (Theme 10)
- Cluster 5: Life after school (Theme 6, 12)
- Cluster 6: Goals and aspirations: (Theme 7)
- Cluster 7: Teacher help and support (Theme 1,2)

Cluster 8: Negative attitudes to school (nil)

### Participant 3

#### *Stage 1: Initial encounter with text*

His mother had experienced emotional trauma at the discovery that Shane was mentally retarded. She accepted the hospital diagnosis but reacted angrily to the school when the psychologist recommended placement in a special class. She was in absolute denial and changed schools. Shane failed grade 1 twice. He made minimal scholastic progress. He should have been transferred to a training centre for the severely mentally disabled, but this could not be done without his mother's consent. He eventually transferred out of primary school at the age of 16. The mother was very frustrated by his activities at the training centre. ("I hated it. I feel they just use the children. They kept him until he was 19 years because they wanted to use him. He had to polish the red floors, clean the bus, and work in the garden everyday. All Shane did was open the gate till nine o' clock. I don't see any learning that he did".

He worked at 'Challenge', the training centre for the severely mentally disabled, and earned R 25.00 per month. One month he earned R 7.00. The parent expected the training centre to teach her son a skill. Shane hated school. He has found his own job as a conductor on the taxis. He is very ambitious because he leaves home everyday, and waits on standby for a job in case a conductor does not turn up. He waits for hours at the taxi rank. He is also dependent on the government social grant of R 700.00 per month.

} clean  
job  
put.

***Stage 2: Identification of themes***

1. Emotional trauma of discovery (“I cried, the hospital said he had brain damage.”)
2. Early intervention by parents (“I noticed that his head was weak and he could not even turn his head. The doctors said he was a late developer. I took him to another hospital. Only at the age of 5 months did doctors diagnose that he had brain damage.”)
3. Parent in denial. (“I returned to sign consent to transfer S. to the special class. I removed him from the school – I still blame the teacher”).
4. Experiencing failure (“He failed grade 1 twice and he could never cope with scholastic tasks”).)
5. Problems with educational placement (“I wanted Shane placed in a training centre for he severely mentally disabled at this stage”).)
6. Negative attitude to school (“He left late for school and didn’t want to go because he hated it.”)
7. Problems with socialisation with peers (“He had no friends and was unhappy. He was victimised when he was in grade 1”).
8. Resistance to segregated setting (“They don’t keep up with the normal class. They isolate themselves in a special class. I didn’t like this.”)
9. Dependence on social grant (“He gets a government social grant of R 700.00 per month”).)
10. Stigmatisation (“The children teased him and they laughed at him”)

11. Negative work experiences (“He worked at ‘Challenge’ and earned R 25.00 per month. One week he came home with R 7.00. He left the job.”)

12. Lack of work skills. (“He came out of school with no skill”)

13. Goals for the future (“I want to work. I am a businessman.”) *more realistic???*

### *Stage 3: Clustering of themes*

- Cluster 1: Parents and emotional trauma (Theme 1,2,3)
- Cluster 2: Accessing help and support (Theme 2)
- Cluster 3: Exclusion in the curriculum (Theme 12, 8, 5)
- Cluster 4: Experience of negative attitudes (Theme 3,7,10 )
- Cluster 5: Life after school (Theme 11,12,9)
- Cluster 6: Goals and aspirations: (Theme 13)
- Cluster 7: Teacher help and support (nil)
- Cluster 8: Negative attitudes to school (6)

### **Participant 4**

#### *Stage 1: Initial encounter with text*

The participant is born of a family with a history of schizophrenia from both parents. She has been on medication for depression for many years. She suffers from depression and is suicidal. She has admitted to me that she has attempted suicide thrice. R. hated school. She was not academically inclined. She got bored very easily, and admitted that she never finishes things even when she tries to cook at

home. She failed grade 1 twice and was still unable to cope. She was then transferred to the special class. She did not qualify for admission to a pre-vocational school because her "I.Q. was too low". She on her own refused admission to the training centre because she perceived the learners there to be "mad". R. has poor social skills, she has no friends, and she is unable to go out on her own. She has not worked and survives on a government social grant. She has <sup>2</sup>two brothers who were also in a special class.

***Stage 2: Identification of themes***

1. Negative attitude to school ("I hated school. I was slow")
2. Experiencing failure ("I was slow. The others were always first. I couldn't catch up with them. I failed grade 1 twice and I still couldn't cope")
3. Poor self-esteem ("I was slow. They saw that there was something wrong with me. I get depressed and I want to kill myself.")
4. Frustrations of life at home ("I get nervous and cannot go out on my own. When I go shopping, I confuse the change. I hate sitting at home and doing nothing.")
5. Aspirations ("I wanted to go to Westridge High School (prevocational school for learning disabled). I want to have friends")
6. Negative attitude to placement ("I was tired of the special class, doing the same things over and over again.")
7. Parent seeks help ("I would like R. to do something. I have been to 'Challenge' – a training centre for the severely mentally disabled - and she is

on the waiting list. It is a big job to look after her because she is suicidal. I take her to the social worker.”)

8. Goals for the future (“I want a job, any job like cooking but I get tired easily”)
9. Dependency on government social grant (“She gets grant of R 700.00 per month”)
10. Boredom with life at home (“I am so bored. I have nothing to do. That is why I try to kill myself.”)
11. Socio-economic problems in family (“We struggle for money. I only depend on the grant and when I have paid off everything I am left with only R 40.00. I depend on family and the church.”)

***Stage 3: Clustering of themes***

- Cluster 1: Parents and emotional trauma (Theme 12 )
- Cluster 2: Accessing help and support (Theme 7)
- Cluster 3: Exclusion in the curriculum (Theme 2,3)
- Cluster 4: Experience of negative attitudes and stereotyping (Theme 1,7 )
- Cluster 5: Life after school (Theme 3, 5, 9, 10, 11)
- Cluster 6: Goals and aspirations: (Theme 6, 9)
- Cluster 7: Teacher help and support ( (nil)
- Cluster 8: Negative attitudes to school (1)

## **Participant 5**

### ***Stage 1: Initial encounter with text***

The participant hated school. He was teased and victimised because he was the oldest in the class and unable to cope. He failed classes, and repeated and this resulted in him being older than his peers. He had a positive attitude to placement in the special class because the teacher was supportive and kind and all the learners in the class were like him. He experienced a great irritation when he was an adolescent by the fact that he had to wear short trousers because he was in a junior class. His peers in the mainstream were in a senior class and were long trousers. He was greatly affected by his friends leaving him, and moving on to high school. He says he remained at primary school till the age of 15 and at 16 years, he was informed he was too old to attend the pre-vocational school. He was employed for two weeks and then put off. The company did not call him back. He was very angry about this. He feels very frustrated and depressed because he “wants” to work. He pulls out chunks of his hair. He is on anti-depressants which he states he hates because they make him fat. He is in desperate need of intervention by a social worker.

### ***Stage 2: Identification of themes***

1. Negative to school (“I hated school”)
2. Stigmatisation (“The children always teased me because I was too big for the class and I couldn’t cope.”)
3. Experiencing failure (“I failed twice”)

4. Teachers' positive attitude ("Mrs. B. was patient and helpful. She answered our questions and listened to us.")
5. Frustration at school ("I had to wear short pants when I was so big. My friends left me and moved on to high school.")
6. Lack of employment opportunities ("I worked for two weeks then the job got finished. I phoned many times but the boss did not call me back.")
7. Experiencing depression ("I am so depressed sitting here at home in this small house. I have no friends. "I take medication for depression. I pull out my hair because I get depressed.")
8. Dependence on social grant for support ("I get a grant from the government – no other money.")
9. Aspirations for future ("I wanted to continue at school. I want to go to college to learn something. I need job experience.")
10. Emotional trauma ("I hate it when we sit in this house the whole day. My sister irritates me.")

***Stage 3: Clustering of themes***

- Cluster 1: Parents and emotional trauma (no data )
- Cluster 2: Accessing help and support (Theme 6)
- Cluster 3: Exclusion in the curriculum (Theme 5, 9)
- Cluster 4: Experience of negative attitudes (Theme 2, 5 )
- Cluster 5: Life after school (Theme 7, 9,10)
- Cluster 6: Goals and aspirations: (Theme 6, 9)

Cluster 7: Teacher help and support (4)

Cluster 8: Negative attitudes to school (1)

### **Participant 6**

#### ***Stage1 : Initial encounter with text***

He was born of deaf parents. He has good speech and language. Economic circumstances at home are very challenging. Often the whole family walked around the area begging for food. G. attended school very irregularly claiming there was no food at home. He claimed he did not like school because he was a poor reader. He said he only liked arts and crafts, and the practical activities of school. He left primary school at age 13, and attended a pre-vocational school. He dropped out mid-year. He claims the school demanded school fees and his were not paid. Gary hated being called names because of his being in the special class. He was employed by an electronics company then he was put off with the promise to call him back when work became available. He was very very frustrated that the company did not call him back. He has good entrepreneurship skills. He fixes radios and television sets. He has many customers but is often not paid by the people. He contributes the money to the family budget to buy food. He managed his sisters' funds when she became a prostitute. The school had discovered that he was having an incestuous relationship with her since he was nine years old. He also picks mangoes during season, and sells them at street corners. When the mangoes are sold out, he becomes a beggar. Gary's parents are very frustrated by his poor behaviour, his lack of ambition, and the fact

that he dropped out of school. They feel the social workers do not care about them. Gary appreciated the caring attitude of teachers at school.

***Stage 2: Identification of themes***

1. Negative attitude to school (“I learnt a lot of things but I did not like school.”)
2. Socio-economic challenges at home ( “I am frustrated that G. left school.”  
“My mother drinks and nags my father to find work. My father cannot find a job even though he has experience.”)
3. Difficulty with curriculum (“I did not like reading. I wanted to make things.”)
4. Negative attitude to placement in special class (“I felt uncomfortable. I hated when they called us names. They called us “Abbies” and I hated this.”)
5. Teacher responsive to child`s needs (“My special class teacher helped me a lot, and gave me bread to take home.”)
6. School fees a barrier (“The school gave us letters for school fees, they wanted too much. I could not afford it so I left school.”)
7. Exclusion from school (“I would have carried on but the (social) welfare said I was too old.”)
8. Lack of employment opportunities (“I worked at Sham’s Electrical Repairs. My uncle got me the job. They told me to take the day off then they didn’t call me back.”)
9. Establishing own job opportunities (“I have a lot of customers. I fix T.V.’s and radios”)

10. Challenges of self-employment (“People start avoiding me because they don’t pay. Some people owe me R 600.00. We fight because they don’t pay.”)

11. Aspirations (“Aye Miss, I want to go to college to learn more. I need to get experience.”)

***Stage 3: Clustering of themes***

Cluster 1: Parents and emotional trauma (2)

Cluster 2: Accessing help and support (nil)

Cluster 3: Exclusion in the curriculum (Theme 3,6,7)

Cluster 4: Experience of negative attitudes and stereotyping (Theme 4)

Cluster 5: Life after school (Theme 2, 8, 9, 10, 11)

Cluster 6: Goals and aspirations: (Theme 11)

Cluster 7: Teacher help and support (5)

Cluster 8: Negative attitudes to school (1,3,4)

**Participant 7**

***Stage 1: Initial encounter with text***

S. failed grade 1 twice, and then failed grade 2. The school instructed his mother to remove him from school because they claimed he was not capable of learning. His mother also has a mental disability, and survives on a disability grant. S. was very vocal about how he hated the stigmatisation and teasing he experienced as a result of being in a special school. He stated that this continued on the bus to the township

where he lived. He hated the perception that the school was a “mad” school. In comparison, he appreciated the support and friendship given at primary school. Racism at school had an impact on his attitude to high school. He raised the issue of being placed in courses he did not select because there were some courses that had the maximum number and could not accommodate more. He hated Afrikaans. He dropped out of school because he could not pay school fees, and stated that the school showed no concern about a learner’s financial predicament. He has been unsuccessful in finding a job. He aspires to return to school. He is concerned about his future, and what will happen to him when his ailing grandmother dies. His grandmother did not make any extra effort to get him back to school because she felt that he was failing each year, and paying his schools fees was money wasted. true.

***Stage 2: Identification of themes***

1. Stigmatisation and stereotyping (“When we travel in the bus pupils from other schools tease you and say you are from the mad school.”)
2. Negative attitude to school (“I hated school because they make fun of you.”)
3. Poor scholastic performance (“I failed grade 1 twice, and failed grade 2.”)
4. School unresponsive to child’s needs (“The school asked us to find another school”)
5. Discrepancy between high and primary school teacher support (“It was nice at primary school because everybody was your friend, and they did not tease you. The teachers were nice; the special class teacher loved us, and gave us things and listened to us when we tried to tell her something. But not at high school.”)

6. Financial constraints (“I left school because of school fees. My granny had no money.”)
7. Lack of employment opportunities (“There are no jobs. I tried to look for work.”)
8. Future aspirations (“Aye miss, I wish I could go back to school.”)
9. Caregiver dilemmas and frustrations (“Ms B. I just gave up because S. is already old, and he was doing very badly at school. He kept on failing so it was money wasted.”)
10. Dependence on grandmothers’ pension (“He must work. My pension has to see to everything, and I am left with no money for food”).

*Stage 3: Clustering of themes*

- Cluster 1: Parents/caregivers and emotional trauma (9)
- Cluster 2: Accessing help and support (nil)
- Cluster 3: Exclusion in the curriculum (Theme 3, 4, 5, 6, 9)
- Cluster 4: Experience of negative attitudes and stereotyping (Theme 1, 9)
- Cluster 5: Life after school (Theme 7, 9, 10)
- Cluster 6: Goals and aspirations: (Theme 8)
- Cluster 7: Teacher help and support (5)
- Cluster 8: Negative attitudes to school (2)

## **Participant 8**

### ***Stage 1: Initial encounter with text***

F. Failed grade 1 twice and then was promoted to grade 2 from where she was transferred to the special class. She was returned to the mainstream at the age of 13 because it was judged that she had made adequate progress. According to her mother F. Was older than her peers, and was teased mercilessly. As a result, the parent took her out of school and kept her at home. F stated that she found school boring. She works at "Challenge" a training centre for the mentally disabled, and finds it satisfying. She earns a salary of R10.00 a fortnight. She goes to work everyday, and if there is no work they knit or watch television. She receives a government grant of R 700.00 per month. She is socially independent. Her parents are pleased that she has a job rather than have her at home with nothing to do.

### ***Stage 2: Identification of themes***

1. Experiencing failure ("I failed grade 1 twice, then I was promoted to grade 2." "I found school boring")
2. Problem of inclusion/exclusion. "She was returned to the mainstream at the age of 13 / 14. She was older than her peers. They teased her mercilessly.")
3. Dissatisfaction with school ("We took her out of school because she couldn't cope and because of the teasing.")
4. Experiencing work ("I like my work. We do different work. We use machines and we put labels on buckets, spades and rakes.")

5. Dependency on social welfare (“I get a social grant. I buy toiletries and give my mother board money.” “ At ‘Challenge’ she earns R 10 per fortnight”).
6. Quality life at home? (“ I look after my dogs. I have four dogs. I feed them and play with them. My brother does not help me with the dogs. Sometimes I watch TV like “Bold and Beautiful”. I also wash dishes.”)

### ***Stage 3: Clustering of themes***

- Cluster 1: Parents/caregivers and emotional trauma (2,3)
- Cluster 2: Accessing help and support (nil)
- Cluster 3: Exclusion in the curriculum (Theme 1,2, 3)
- Cluster 4: Experience of negative attitudes and stereotyping (Theme 2,3)
- Cluster 5: Life after school (Theme 4, 5, 6)
- Cluster 6: Goals and aspirations: (nil)
- Cluster 7: Teacher help and support (nil)
- Cluster 8: Negative attitudes to school (1)

### **Participant 9**

#### ***Stage 1: Initial encounter with text***

R. is one of two children in her family who were both in special class. They were exposed to some very violent domestic violence during their childhood. After the interview, the father came to the principal on the Saturday, and stated that he was concerned that people would tell me lies about him. I had to make a return visit to

assure the family of confidentiality. I had a cold reception during my first visit and was made to stand outside. Fortunately, R. saw me and recognised me so the grandmother reluctantly invited me in. R. had a clear memory of her school days and the things she did. She was desperate for a job and was frustrated over being at home with nothing to do. She stated that she enjoyed the practical work at school. She was negative about working at 'Challenge' – a training centre for the mentally disabled, and stated that the people there were "mad". Being placed in the mainstream frustrated her because the work was difficult and the teachers were unsympathetic. She was too old for the class. She was teased because she was timid and withdrawn. She did not remain long at the training centre, and has stayed at home since she left. She receives a government social grant of R 700.00 per month. Two boys she knew recently raped her. She was greatly traumatised by the experience and is still receiving counselling and therapy to cope with the experience.

*Stage 2: Identification of themes*

1. Boredom of life at home ("I am so bored. I just watch T.V. and sometimes I go the shop.")
2. Aspirations and goals ("I want a job. I want to be a designer.")

3. Negative attitude to sheltered work environment (“No ways, I cannot work there, the people are mad. All my friends will laugh at me.” (“I hated it. It was boring. We just cleaned up and cut out things.”))
4. Challenges of inclusion in the mainstream (“The work was too difficult. The teachers shout at you when you are slow.”)
5. Stigmatisation and stereotyping (“She was old for grade 6. She was teased because she was timid and withdrawn.”)
6. Parental support (“I play the piano and let her sing in church. I let her read small parts, and she is becoming more confident.”)
7. Dependency on social welfare (“She is dependant on a government social grant of R 700.00 per month”.)
8. Poor school experiences (“I can’t get a job. I just sit at home. I am so bored.”)
9. Vulnerability to social risks factors (“I was raped by two boys I know.”)

***Stage 3: Clustering of themes***

- Cluster 1: Parents/caregivers and emotional trauma (Theme 5)
- Cluster 2: Accessing help and support (Theme 6)
- Cluster 3: Exclusion in the curriculum (Theme 1,2, 3)
- Cluster 4: Experience of negative attitudes and stereotyping (Theme 3,5)
- Cluster 5: Life after school (Theme 1, 7,8,9)
- Cluster 6: Goals and aspirations: (Theme 2)
- Cluster 7: Teacher help and support (nil)
- Cluster 8: Negative attitudes to school (Theme 1)

## **Participant 10**

### ***Stage 1: Initial encounter with text***

It was difficult to interview this participant, as she was unable to respond to the questions put to her. Her mother was interviewed instead. A. was transferred out of grade 1 class straight into the special class. The normal procedure was that a learner had to fail grade 1 first but hers was an exceptional case because she was bordering on severe mental disability. This decision was based on her I.Q. score. She was unable to cope in the special class, and she was transferred to the training centre for learners with severe learning disabilities. She responded positively in that she liked the environment, but her mother could not see any progress. Experience of domestic violence at home affected her. She refused to go to school when there had been a fight between her parents. She clung to her mother and would not leave. She eventually dropped out of school when her elder sister left. She has been unable to work, and has to be constantly monitored and supervised by her grandmother. She receives a government social grant.

### ***Stage 2: Identification of themes***

1. The challenges of schooling (“ She was unable to cope in the mainstream or special class even though an individual plan was devised for her.” She did well at the training centre, and learnt to write and recognise some letters” )

2. Experiencing life after school (“She is not employable. She is kept at home and watches T.V.” “She wants to do things and gets frustrated when she cannot do them.” “She gets frustrated because of boredom.”)
3. Support in family (“I play the piano, and I let her sing at church.”, “She has the most beautiful singing voice”) *nil stigma*
4. Impact of emotional trauma in the home (“She refused to go to school when there was violence in the home. She clung to me.”)
5. Dependency on social welfare (“She gets a grant of R700.00 a month”).

### ***Stage 3: Clustering of themes***

- Cluster 1: Parents/caregivers and emotional trauma (nil)
- Cluster 2: Accessing help and support (Theme 3)
- Cluster 3: Exclusion in the curriculum (Theme 1)
- Cluster 4: Experience of negative attitudes and stereotyping (nil)
- Cluster 5: Life after school (Theme 2, 3)
- Cluster 6: Goals and aspirations: (nil)
- Cluster 7: Teacher help and support (nil)
- Cluster 8: Negative attitudes to school (nil)

### **4.3 Discussion of Findings**

Section 4.2 examined the data obtained from the 10 life stories of school leavers from a special class. It was possible to cluster themes that emerged from the individual

stories into broad issues that impacted or continue to impact the lives of school leavers. These issues will be further engaged with in the next sections.

#### **4.3.1 Parents/caregivers and emotional concerns**

Nine of the ten parents or caregivers reported emotional difficulties they experienced in engaging both at the schooling stage and in the post school years of the participants. Difficulties included the shock and strong emotions that were evoked at discovery that their children were 'not normal'; the unresponsiveness of the school to the child's needs, poor job opportunities, low income at sheltered workshops, exclusion from school; frustration at school failure and repetition; lack of support from school to meet child's needs, dependence on social welfare grant from government.

#### **4.3.2 Accessing help and support**

Eight of the caregivers and parents tried to access help and support for their children in the school years, and after their children left school. One parent took the child for private early intervention programmes at the parents' own cost. This involved sessions with a private occupational therapist. One parent complained about the unsatisfactory nature of the teaching and learning at the school in the hope that help may be the outcome. Unfortunately, this led to further marginalisation of the child on the part of the teacher. One participant has tried to gain relief from the boredom at school by engaging in recreational activities such as joining a gym and playing soccer. However, it is evident that this was not sustained. Parents have also sought to place their children at sheltered workshops, as it is evident that there is no alternate placement for their

children. Two parents are trying to make life worthwhile for their school leavers by encouraging involvement in music at the local church. The issue of building community based support to address the issue of barriers to participation in community and society is a proposal embedded in Education White Paper 6: Building an Inclusive Education and Training System (Department of Education, July 2001). In practice, placing mechanisms in place that would enable community members to access support from various community structures such as churches, businesses, community organisations, NGOs, special schools that will serve as resource centres. The findings in this study suggests that parents, caregivers and the school leavers themselves have limited access to support.

#### **4.3.3 Negative attitudes towards school**

Nine participants and their parents or caregivers expressed negative attitudes towards the school. Many participants indicated that early in the schooling years, they began to hate school. A few developed strategies to avoid going to school. One parent explained about her son, “ He began to hate going to school, and complained that he only played with blocks.” Another explains, “I was slow. They saw that there was something wrong with me.” Participant 7 stated, “I hated school because they made fun of you.”

Donaldson cited in Roberts (1995) explains that in many countries large numbers of children leave school with the bitter taste of defeat in them. The child struggles at school, is quickly labelled because he or she cannot cope in the classroom, and this

affects their self-esteem. Du Plessis (1994) further suggests that what awaits them outside the school is a dismal future.

#### **4.3.4 Exclusion/inclusion in the Curriculum**

As stated earlier, the term ‘curriculum’ is used broadly in this study to include the ethos and culture of the learning environment; the learning programmes; the teaching practices; how learning outcomes are assessed; learning materials, facilities and equipment available; the medium of teaching and learning; the capacity of educators; the nature of support provided to enable access to the learning programmes. The findings revealed that all ten participants in this study experienced various exclusionary practices during their schooling years. These included the issue of isolation in a special class; incidents of racism, a curriculum that was unresponsive to their individual needs; lack of training of teachers to meet their unique needs; a curriculum that did not focus on life skills, prevocational training, or skills for independent living. One parent commented, “He came out of school with no skill”. Another commented, “I did not like reading. I wanted to make things.” Two of the participants left school because of the pressure placed by the school regarding payment of school fees.

These findings suggest that we require an inclusive approach in attempting to address these issues. Fullen (1982) suggests that educational change depends on what schools do and on what teachers do and think. Schools should not ignore struggling and incompetent learners. Only when teachers undergo a ‘perception change’ will they be

able to take pupils' individual personalities and learning styles into account and create a more responsive learning environment. A number of participants experienced persistent failure and repetition of grades with no specialised intervention to meet their needs.

Of the ten participants, five suggested that there were a few teachers who were supportive of them at school. Four of the 5 made reference to a particular special class teacher at the school.

#### **4.3.5 Experience of negative attitudes and stereotyping**

All time participants experienced negative attitudes during the school years, and many of them continue to do so now in their adult lives. The Report of the National Commission on Special Needs in Education and Training and the Report of the National Committee on Education Support Services (Department of Education, 1997) in stressing the need for a social rights model of disability and learning difficulties suggests that one of the greatest barriers to learning and participation in school, community and society is negative attitudes and stereotyping. In the case of the participants in this study experience of negative attitudes emanate from peers, teachers, and caregivers. With certain participants, the policy of locating special classes in primary schools was a root of the problem. This resulted in the participants being much older their peers. One participant who is self-employed has the challenge of having to deal with clients who do not meet their financial commitments for work done.

#### **4.3.6 The complexities of life after school**

All participants experience various tensions and challenges in their lives after school. Nine of the participants are reliant on the social welfare grant of R700.00 for their living. Those who work in sheltered employment are paid low wages for work done that seems to suggest forms of exploitation. Six of the ten participants indicated that they were bored with their lives. Participant 2 explained, "I have done nothing. I just sit here at home and watch television and then I sleep."

Three participants experience depression and have indicated suicidal tendencies. The vulnerability of the school leavers to social risks is evident in the fact that one of the women was a victim of rape in the community. The study revealed that just one of the ten participants is engaging in a form of self-employment, "I have a lot of customers. I fix TVs and radios." (Participant 6). Participant 1 has skills in panel beating and would like to start his own business. The findings reveal that 8 of the 10 school leavers have no work skills after schooling. All participants have goals and aspirations for a better life ranging from gaining work skills, going back to school, going to college, finding a job, wanting to have friends, gaining work experience.

#### **4.4 Conclusion**

The findings in this study suggest the quality of the life outcomes of the ten school leavers from the special class educational provision is far from positive. Various economic, social and political factors have and continue to impact the lives of the ten schools leavers and their families. In a sense, it is likely that these schools leavers and

their peers may be deemed a 'lost group' whom our society has failed. Perhaps there is a need for a more large scale study to investigate the extent of the problem raised in this study so that it may be addressed in the context of the implementation of Education White Paper 6 that is currently underway.

## CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Through stories of the ten school leavers from a special class, this study has revealed the contextual dynamics, and struggles that have made and make meanings in their lives. By communicating their stories, the school leavers and their parents or caregivers have enabled the researcher to connect with their anxieties, concerns, experiences, and the challenges in their lives. The study highlights the fact that the lives of these ten individuals and that of their families are impacted by various exclusionary pressures that they appear to have no power over. What this suggests is that the processes inclusion and exclusion are multiple and complex, and are enacted within wider social and political contexts. The challenge for schools, communities and society is constantly to subject these notions and practices to interrogation, and to make society accountable for the lives of all its citizens, irrespective of difference.

Social and educational inclusion cannot occur without introducing fundamental transformation to the system. This study reaffirms the critical need for a systemic approach to social and educational inclusion, and the need to continually probe issues of educational policy, curriculum, assessment, pedagogy, and social relations in schools and communities. Findings in this study seem to suggest that if the implementation of Education White Paper 6 (Department of Education, July 2001) does not engage with relations of power and issues of equity, it can undermine the goal of social justice and democratic participation in society for all. It is critical that the needs of school leavers from special class provision are given priority in the transformation process that is underway in the implementation of Education White

Paper 6: Building an Education and Training System (Department of Education, July 2001).

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